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ABSTRACT

In the past sociologists have used a variety of creative operationalizations to study the intergenerational social mobility of women. A review of the literature reveals that females have often been eliminated from studies of social mobility. When the mobility of females has been studied, the woman's mobility has usually been determined by comparing the social class of her father to that of her husband. Therefore, a woman's mobility has been seen as something which is not measured by her own accomplishments. By analyzing current normative trends and empirical evidence the past practices of eliminating females, or of measuring females' mobility by using male referents is called into question and alternative methods of measurement are suggested. (Author)

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Measures of Female Mobility: Past, Present, and Future

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The (Non) Treatment of Women in the Study of Social Mobility

The assumptions held by sociologists concerning the role that women played in their own mobility has resulted in a variety of creative operationalizations in measuring female mobility.

This paper will examine these assumptions and review the treatment or non-treatment of women in the sociological literature in this area.

Social mobility is an integral concept in sociology. Many sociological assumptions rest on the premise that mobility is largely responsible for a variety of behaviors or opinions (Lipset, 1960; Lopreato, 1967; Hodge and Trieman, 1966; Rosenberg, 1971).

Despite the attention given to mobility, some of the research on the subject simply excluded females from their purview (Sewell, 1971; O'Kane, 1965). Other research placed the importance of female mobility on a secondary level to that of male mobility. For example, Blau and Duncan (1967), expressed concern about the influence of more women in the labor force upon male mobility, but did not show much concern for the study of female mobility.

Other studies have determined a women's class and mobility by comparing her father's occupation to that of her husband (Warner, 1949; Turner, 1964). As explained by Wallace (1966),

> A women's socially defined success is typically dependent not upon her own occupation and job mobility but on her husband's...there is only one departure and arrival in her life cycle; her exchange of a father determined status for a husband determined one.

In a major study of the mobility of adolescents, Douvan and Adelson (1966) sought to compare male and female mobility. They determined a boy's aspiration for mobility by

comparing the occupation of the boy's father to the boy's aspired-to occupation, while they determined a girl's aspired mobility by comparing the occupation of the girl's father to the occupation which each girl would have liked her husband to have. Douvan and Adelson explained, "Because of the nature of their mobility aspirations (as we see it), we thought it appropriate to measure the discrepancy (If any) between the father's occupation and the preferences girls have for their husbands' occupations (rather than their own)." *

The reasons given for this methodological approach was that males are expected to seek identity through their occupations while females find their identity through their husbands. While a boy's mobility is seen as a result of his ability, a girl's mobility is a result of ability, charm and who chooses her (Douvan and Adelson, 1966).

The reasons cited by Douvan and Adelson for their treatment of female adolescents is not dissimilar to the reasons given for the treatment of adult females in the mobility studies previously cited.

A reason often given to explain the differential treatment of women in mobility studies is the probability of role conflict faced by a working woman. Many sociologists have found that there are major differences in the role expectations of males and females when it comes to family and occupational obligations (Cavan, 1963; Komarovsky, 1946; Parsons, 1942; and Wallin, 1950). These theorists argue that since the cultural expectations are for females to place their role as mother and housewife above that of a career, females will have lower occupational aspirations than their male peers. This

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* Interestingly, in the 1955-1956 study, approximately 50% of the older girls refused to answer the question about their future husband's occupations.

would have serious consequences for a study of mobility because females would be found in lower occupational levels than would have been predicted by their fathers' occupations or their own education. This assumption is challenged by a study by DeJong, Brower and Robin (1971) who found "essentially no differences between female and male patterns of mobility in the American occupational structure."

Additional arguments given for the differential treatment of females in mobility studies comes from those who argue that a female's occupation differs from a male's in duration and purpose (Rossi, 1964). The supporters of this point of view often refer to the fact that females have less continuity in their occupations because they are less likely to work during child bearing and early child rearing years (Waldman, 1970). Though this discontinuity in work may influence advancement and promotion, it has not been shown to influence the types of occupations women seek. Furthermore, trends in labor force participation by women, which will be reviewed below, have shown dramatic changes in the past few years.

The differential treatment or exclusion of females from past studies of mobility was a reflection of the former status of women in American society at that time. However, significant changes have taken place in the past twenty-five years, especially during the past decade. These changes make it likely that women now play a more significant role in determining their own future statuses.

Changes in female's increased capabilities to control their own occupational destiny should be apparent in trends in female educational attainment and in changes in female potential for occupational mobility.

Since class of destination and potential mobility is significantly related to education, it is worth noting that there has been a consistent increase in the percent of women's

enrollment in institutions of higher learning over the past twenty years. The percent of women enrolled in collages has increasedfrom 34% in 1951 to 42% in 1971, and is projected to rise to 47% by 1981 (Department of Health Education and Welfare--H.E.W.-- Digest of Educational Statistics, 1972; Department of Health Education and Welfare, 1972 Projections of Educational Statistics I981-1982).

The percent of increased enrollment for females over the past twenty years has been higher than that for males, and by 1980 it is expected that females will account for more than one half of the increase of college enrollment (H.E.W. Digest Tables 85, 95. H.E.W. Projections Tables 15, 26).

Furthermore, the increase in women's educational achievement is continued in Graduate education with female resident graduate enrollment up from 29% in 1961 to 38% in 1971, and projected to be 44% by 1981 (H.E.W. Projection Table 17).

In analyzing data which is specifically concerned with mobility, it is worth noting that of all students who are the first in their families to enroll in college, females made up 42% in 1961, 47% in 1971 and are projected to make up 49% by 1981 (H.E.W. Projections Table 15). From these data it appears that females from non-college families will have the same opportunities for educational upward mobility as males by the next decade.

Though education is a critical determinant of potential mobility, the figures presented above cannot perfectly predict what will happen beyond formal education. Therefore, it is important to note the empirical evidence pointing to the opening of the occupational structure for women.

By 1970, 50% of American women ages 18-64 were in the labor force, compared with 30% in 1940 and 20% in 1900 (Oppenheimer, 1973). This represented 37% of all workers in

1970 (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1972).

This increase of women in the labor force can be found in all age groups of women and among both married and unmarried females. While only 26% of females ages 20-24 worked in 1950, 47% of women in that catergory worked in 1970 (Oppenheimer, 1973). Of all women working in 1967, 58% were married. This represents a 274% increase from 1940 (U.S. Department of Labor, 1969).

Since a female's familial obligations are often cited as a major deterrent to her mobility, it is significant to note that women are currently having fewer children and the smaller family size has resulted in an increase in the number of years a women can work, and an increase in the interest women now have in a career (Kreps, 1971). Furthermore, there has been an 82% increase in the number of women in the labor force with pre-school children between 1960 and 1969 from 18% to 33% (Oppenheimer, 1973). Thus it appears that a woman's position in the child rearing cycle is less of a deterrent to economic participation than in the past.

An additional question posed by those studying the mobility patterns of women is the influence of status change due to the status of a woman's husband (Centers, 1949; Hollingshead, 1950; Merton, 1941). A recent examination of this question found no evidence to support the idea that women marry up or down more than do men (Zick, 1968). Since women now have more freedom for educational advancement this should give them greater opportunity for marrying men with similar educational backgrounds.

Although there may still be occupational discrimination against women, and channeling of women into certain occupational fields, there is reason to believe that; increased education, smaller families, new occupational aspirations, and enforcement of Affirmative Action Laws will help to overcome the

past discriminatory practices (Sutler, 1971).

In a recent study of occupational mobility by DeJong et.al. (1971), it was expected that females would exhibit "(1) less occupational inheritance than males, (2) less upward mobility than males and (3) less long-distance upward mobility than males." Instead they found very little difference between male and female occupational mobility, leading them to conclude that "Generalizations about occupational mobility which have been made for males apply for females."

After an extensive review of the influence of demographic factors on female employment, Oppenheimer (1973) concluded that "Women's family status (their husband's) may be becoming less important as a determinant of their labor force status than other factors such as economic aspirations, marketable skills, occupational commitments and the like."

Based on the findings cited above and the empirical trends in education and work, the assumption of prior studies that females derived their social status exclusively from their husbands is inaccurate.

Previous research concentrated on the role of a woman as a housewife and mother. Therefore a woman's mobility was primarily determined by the man she would marry. Since it was assumed that a woman played the reactive role when it came to marriage (proposals, etc.) it appeared that women had little control over their future statuses.

These assumptions can no longer be accepted as applicable to the present generation of younger women; particularly to contemporary female adolescents.

The exclusion of females from studies of mobility which resulted from these past assumptions should no longer be tolerated in studies which offer to generalize about the social mobility of the population as a whole.

If current trends continue, new measures of intergenerational social mobility for women must be used.

Figure 1 below describes some of the past, present, and future options available to sociologists:

FIGURE 1: Four Options of Studying the Intergenerational Mobility of Women.

Comparisons Made Between the Socioeconomic Status (occupations) of:

	Herself	Her Husband
Her Mother	A	B
Her Father	C	D

Option A compares the social class (occupation) of a woman to that of her mother. This option would be most useful in comparing the changing role of women over time. This option might be the most appropriate method for measuring the intergenerational social mobility of females within one or two generations, if the proportion of women entering the labor force continues to rise.*

* Option B serves no useful purpose for studying American society, but may be of value in studying other societies.

Option C compares the social class attained by a woman to that of her father. In light of the former role expectations for females, this method might be most appropriate for studying the intergenerational social mobility of the present generation of females who seek careers.

Option D measures a woman's mobility by comparing the social class of her father to that of her husband. This has been the traditional method of measuring female mobility but its value and validity can no longer be accepted as the most appropriate method of studying female mobility.

Future trends in occupational expectations and opportunities for females will help to determine which method of measurement will be used.

While the options offered here are not exhaustive it is hoped that they will help to establish some guidelines for future researchers.

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